

APHRODITE was the great Olympian goddess of beauty, love, pleasure and and procreation. She was depicted as a beautiful woman usually accompanied by the winged godling Eros (Love). Her attributes included a dove, apple, scallop shell and mirror. In classical sculpture and fresco she was often depicted nude.

Some of the more famous myths featuring the goddess include:--

- ☐ Her birth from the sea foam;
- ☐ Her adulterous affair with the god Ares;
- ☐ Her love for Adonis, a handsome Cypriot youth who was tragically killed by a boar;
- ☐ Her love for Ankhises, a shepherd-prince;
- ☐ The judgement of Paris in which the goddess was awarded the prize of the golden apple in return for promising Paris Helene in marriage;
- ☐ The Trojan War in which she supported her favourites Paris and Aeneas and was wounded in the fighting;
- ☐ The race of Hippomenes for Atalanta, which was won with the help of the goddess and her golden apples;
- ☐ The death of Hippolytos, who was destroyed by the goddess for scorning her worship;
- ☐ The statue of Pygmalion which was brought to life by Aphrodite in answer to his prayers;
- ☐ The persecution of Psyche, the maiden loved by the goddess' son Eros.

APOLLON (or Apollo) was the great Olympian god of prophecy and oracles, healing, plague and disease, music, song and poetry, archery, and the protection of the young. He was depicted as a handsome, beardless youth with long hair and various attributes including:--a wreath and branch of laurel; bow and quiver; raven; and lyre.

The most famous myths of Apollon include:--

- ☐ His birth on the island of Delos;
- ☐ The slaying of the serpent Python which guarded the oracular shrine of Delphoi;
- ☐ The slaying of the giant Tityos who attempted to carry off the god's mother Leto;
- ☐ The destruction of the Niobides whose mother had offended Leto with her boasts;
- ☐ His music contest with the satyr Marsyas who lost and was flayed alive;
- ☐ His love for the youth Hyacinthos who was killed by a discus throw and transformed into a flower;
- ☐ His love for the nymph Daphne who fled from him and was transformed into a laurel tree;
- ☐ His love for Koronis who was slain by Artemis for her infidelity;
- ☐ The murder of the Kyklopes who had forged the lightning bolt used to destroy his son Asklepios;
- ☐ His service as bondsman to the mortal Admetos;
- ☐ His struggle with Herakles for the Delphic tripod;
- ☐ The Trojan War in which he brought plague to the Greeks and helped Paris slay Akhilleus.
- ☐

ARES was the great Olympian god of war, battlelust, civil order and manly courage. In Greek art he was depicted as either a mature, bearded warrior dressed in battle arms, or a nude beardless youth with helm and spear. Because of his lack of distinctive attributes he is often difficult to identify in classical art.

Some of the more famous myths featuring the god include:--

- ☐ His adulterous affair with Aphrodite in which the pair were trapped in a net laid by her husband

Hephaistos;

- ☐ The slaying of Adonis, his rival for the love of Aphrodite, in the guise of a boar;
- ☐ The transformation of Kadmos of Thebes and his wife Harmonia into serpents;
- ☐ The murder of Hallirhothios to avenge his daughter's rape and his subsequent trial in the court of the Areiopagos;
- ☐ The arrest of Sisypheos, an impious man who kidnapped the god Death;
- ☐ The battle of Herakles and Kyknos in which the god intervened in support of his son;
- ☐ His support of the Amazones, warrior daughters of the god;
- ☐ His capture by the Aloadae giants who imprisoned him in a bronze jar;
- ☐ The Trojan War in which he was wounded by Diomedes in battle with the help of Athene.
- ☐

ARTEMIS was the great Olympian goddess of hunting, wilderness and wild animals. She was also a goddess of childbirth, and the protectress of the girl child up to the age of marriage. Her twin brother Apollon was similarly the protector of the boy child. Together the two gods were also bringers of sudden death and disease--Artemis targeted women and girls, and Apollon men and boys.

In ancient art Artemis was usually depicted as a girl dressed in a short knee-length chiton and equipped with a hunting bow and quiver of arrows.

Some of the best known myths featuring the goddess include:--

- ☐ Her birth, immediately following which she assisted her mother in the birth of her twin brother Apollon;
- ☐ The Trojan War where she was beaten by Hera in an angry contest of the gods;
- ☐ The hunter Aktaion who encountered the goddess whilst she was bathing and was turned into a stag;
- ☐ The Aloadae giants who attempted to storm Olympos but were tricked by Artemis into killing each other;
- ☐ The sacrifice of Iphigeneia whom King Agamemnon offered to her for the passage of the Greek fleet to Troy;
- ☐ The giant Orion, a close companion of the goddess, who was slain by the goddess or her jealous brother;
- ☐ The Kalydonian boar sent by Artemis to ravage Kaldyon;
- ☐ The nymph Kallisto, a companion of Artemis, who was seduced by Zeus in the guise of the goddess.

ATHENE (or Athena) was the great Olympian goddess of wise counsel, war, the defence of towns, heroic endeavour, weaving, pottery and other crafts. She was depicted crowned with a crested helm, armed with shield and spear, and wearing the snake-trimmed aegis cloak wrapped around her breast and arm, adorned with the monstrous head of the Gorgon.

The more famous myths featuring the goddess Athene include:--

- ☐ Her birth from the head of Zeus, fully-grown and arrayed in arms;
- ☐ Her contest with Poseidon for dominion of Athens in which she produced the first olive tree and he the first horse;
- ☐ The War of the Giants in which she buried Enkelados beneath Mount Etna and made her aegis from the skin of Pallas;
- ☐ The attempted rape of the goddess by Hephaistos, who spilled his seed upon the earth and produced Erichthonios, who she then adopted as her own;

- ☐ The assisting of Perseus in his quest to slay the Gorgon and the Argonauts in their quest for the Golden Fleece;
- ☐ The assisting of Herakles with his twelve labours;
- ☐ The weaving contest with Arakhne who was transformed by the goddess into a spider;  
The blinding of Teiresias for viewing her naked in the bath;
- ☐ The Judgement of Paris in which she competed with Hera and Aphrodite for the prize of the golden apple;
- ☐ The Trojan War where she sided with the Greeks in battle, but attacked their ships with a storm when they failed to punish Oilean Ajax for violating her Trojan shrine.

DEMETER was the great Olympian goddess of agriculture, grain, and bread, the prime sustenance of mankind. She also presided over the foremost of the Mystery Cults which promised its initiates the path to a blessed afterlife. Demeter was depicted as a mature woman, often crowned and holding sheafs of wheat and a torch.

Some of the more famous myths featuring the goddess include:--

- ☐ The abduction of her daughter Persephone by Hades, and the great dearth she brought down upon the earth;
- ☐ The nursing of Demophoon, the young son of King Keleus of Eleusis;
- ☐ The journeys of Triptolemos, a hero sent by the goddess to instruct mankind in agriculture;
- ☐ Her assault by Poseidon who forcefully coupled with her in the form of a horse;
- ☐ The punishment of Erysikhthon who was cursed with an unquenchable hunger by the goddess for cutting down her holy grove.

DIONYSOS (or Dionysus) was the great Olympian god of wine, vegetation, pleasure and festivity. He was depicted as either an older bearded god or a pretty effeminate, long-haired youth. His attributes included the *thyrsos* (a pine-cone tipped staff), drinking cup, leopard and fruiting vine. He was usually accompanied by a troop of Satyrs and Maenades (female devotees or nymphs).

Some of the more famous myths featuring the god include:--

- ☐ His birth from the thigh of Zeus and his fostering by Ino, Seilenos and the Nysiades;
- ☐ His flight from Lykourgos who drove the young god and his followers into the sea;
- ☐ The dismemberment of Pentheus who denied the god's divinity and attempted to drive him from Thebes;
- ☐ The instruction of Ikarios in winemaking;
- ☐ The metamorphosis of the Tyrrhenian pirates into dolphins when they attempted to kidnap him;
- ☐ His love for Ariadne who he found abandoned by Theseus on the island of Naxos and wed;
- ☐ His journey to the underworld to recover his mother or wife;
- ☐ His campaign against the Indians.

HEPHAISTOS was the great Olympian god of fire, metalworking, stonemasonry and the art of sculpture. He was usually depicted as a bearded man holding hammer and tongs--the tools of a smith--and riding a donkey.

Some of the more famous myths featuring the god include:--

- ☐ His fall from Olympos in which he was cast away by Hera at birth;
- ☐ The trapping of Hera in a cursed throne and his return to Olympos;
- ☐ The adultery of his wife Aphrodite who was trapped with Ares in a golden net;

- ☐ The crafting of Pandora, the first woman, at the command of Zeus;
- ☐ The attempted rape of Athena which resulted in the impregnation of Earth and the birth of Erichthonios;
- ☐ The crafting of the cursed necklace of Harmonia which doomed her descendants to a cycle of tragedy;
- ☐ The Trojan War in which he fought the river-god Skamandros with fire;
- ☐ The crafting of the armour of Akhilleus at the request of the hero's mother Thetis.

HERA was the Olympian queen of the gods and the goddess of women and marriage. She was also a goddess of the sky and starry heavens. She was usually depicted as a beautiful woman wearing a crown and holding a royal, lotus-tipped staff. Sometimes she held a royal lion or had a cuckoo or hawk as her familiar.

Some of the more famous myths featuring the goddess include:--

- ☐ Her marriage to Zeus and her earlier seduction by the god in the guise of a cuckoo bird;
- ☐ The birth of Hephaistos who she produced alone and cast from heaven because he was crippled;
- ☐ Her persecution of the consorts of Zeus, especially Leto, Semele and Alkmene;
- ☐ Her persecution of Herakles and Dionysos, the favourite bastard sons of Zeus;
- ☐ The punishment of Ixion, who was chained to a fiery wheel for attempting to violate the goddess;
- ☐ The assisting of the Argonauts in their quest for the golden fleece, their leader Jason being one of her favourites;
- ☐ The judgement of Paris, in which she competed against Aphrodite and Athene for the prize of the golden apple;
- ☐ The Trojan War, in which she assisted the Greeks.

HERMES was the great Olympian God of animal husbandry, roads, travel, hospitality, heralds, diplomacy, trade, thievery, language, writing, persuasion, cunning wiles, athletic contests, gymnasiums, astronomy, and astrology. He was also the personal agent and herald of Zeus, the king of the gods. Hermes was depicted as either a handsome and athletic, beardless youth, or as an older bearded man. His attributes included the herald's wand or *kerykeion* (Latin *caduceus*), winged boots, and sometimes a winged travellers cap and chlamys cloak.

Some of the more famous myths featuring the god include:--

- ☐ The theft of Apollon's cattle which he accomplished as a toddler in the crib;
- ☐ The transformation of the tell-tale Battos to stone;
- ☐ The slaying of Argos Panoptes, the hundred-eyed guardian of the nymph Io;
- ☐ The assisting of Perseus in the hero's quest to slay Medousa;
- ☐ The seduction of Khione on the same night as his brother Apollon;
- ☐ The assisting of Odysseus in his encounter with the witch Kirke.

POSEIDON was the great Olympian god of the sea, rivers, flood and drought, earthquakes, and horses. He was depicted as a mature man of sturdy build with a dark beard, and holding a trident.

Some of the more famous myths featuring the god include:--

- ☐ The War of the Titanes where he fought beside Zeus and Hades to imprison the old gods in

Tartaros;

- ☐ The division of the cosmos amongst the sons of Kronos in which he received dominion over the sea;
- ☐ The burying of Polybotes beneath the island of Kos in the giant war;
- ☐ The sending of a sea-monster to punish the Trojans for refusing to pay him for building their walls;
- ☐ The seduction of women such as Tyro, Amymone, Aithra and the Gorgon Medousa;
- ☐ His contest with Athena for dominion of Athens in which he produced the first horse;
- ☐ The persecution of Odysseus for the blinding of his son the Kyklops Polyphemos.

ZEUS was the king of the gods, the god of sky and weather, law, order and fate. He was depicted as a regal man, mature with sturdy figure and dark beard. His usual attributes were a lightning bolt, royal sceptre and eagle.

Some of the more famous myths featuring the god include:--

- ☐ His birth and upbringing in the Diktaion cave, where he was nursed by Amaltheia and guarded by the shield-clashing Kouretes;
- ☐ The Titan War in which he overthrew the Titanes and imprisoned them in Tartaros;
- ☐ His battle with Typhoeus, a hundred headed, monstrous giant who attempted to capture heaven;
- ☐ The War of the Giants who attempted to storm Olympos but were slain by Zeus and the gods;
- ☐ The Great Deluge in which he flooded the earth to destroy mankind and begin the world anew;
- ☐ His conflict with Prometheus over the theft of benefactions for mankind;
- ☐ The punishment of Salmoneus, Tantalos and Ixion, men who offended the god with their impiety;
- ☐ The birth and life of Herakles, his favoured son, who he had transferred to Olympos at death;
- ☐ His extramarital affairs with women such as Leda, seduced in the form of a swan; Europa, as a bull; Danae, as a golden shower; Kallisto, as Artemis; and Antiope as a satyr;
- ☐ The Trojan War which he orchestrated from start to end, including the casting of the golden apple of discord.

THE ERINYES were three netherworld goddesses who avenged crimes against the natural order. They were particularly concerned with homicide, unfilial conduct, crimes against the gods, and perjury. A victim seeking justice could call down the curse of the Erinyes upon the criminal. The most powerful of these was the curse of the parent upon the child--for the Erinyes were born of just such a crime, being sprung from the blood of Ouranos, when he was castrated by his son Kronos.

The wrath of the Erinyes manifested itself in a number of ways. The most severe of these was the tormenting madness inflicted upon a patricide or matricide. Murderers might suffer illness or disease; and a nation harbouring such a criminal, could suffer dearth, and with it hunger and disease. The wrath of the Erinyes could only be placated with the rite ritual purification and the completion of some task assigned for atonement.

The goddesses were also servants of Hades and Persephone in the underworld where they oversaw the torture of criminals consigned to the Dungeons of the Damned.

The Erinyes were similar to if not the same as the Poinai (Retaliations), Arai (Curses), Praxidikai (Exacters of Justice) and Maniai (Madnesses).

They were depicted as ugly, winged women with hair, arms and waists entwined with poisonous

serpents. They wielded whips and were clothed either in the long black robes of mourners, or the short-length skirts and boots of huntress- maidens.

THE MOIRAI (or Moirae) were the goddesses of fate who personified the inescapable destiny of man. They assigned to every person his or her fate or share in the scheme of things. Their name means "Parts." "Shares" or "Allotted Portions." Zeus Moiragetes, the god of fate, was their leader,. Klotho, whose name meant 'Spinner', spun the thread of life. Lakheisis, whose name meant 'Apportioner of Lots'--being derived from a word meaning to receive by lot--, measured the thread of life. Atropos (or Aisa), whose name meant 'She who cannot be turned', cut the thread of life.

At the birth of a man, the Moirai spun out the thread of his future life, followed his steps, and directed the consequences of his actions according to the counsel of the gods. It was not an inflexible fate; Zeus, if he chose, had the power of saving even those who were already on the point of being seized by their fate. The Fates did not abruptly interfere in human affairs but availed themselves of intermediate causes, and determined the lot of mortals not absolutely, but only conditionally, even man himself, in his freedom was allowed to exercise a certain influence upon them. As man's fate terminated at his death, the goddesses of fate become the goddesses of death, *Moirai Thanatoio*.

The Moirai were independent, at the helm of necessity, directed fate, and watched that the fate assigned to every being by eternal laws might take its course without obstruction; and Zeus, as well as the other gods and man, had to submit to them. They assigned to the Erinyes, who inflicted the punishment for evil deeds, their proper functions; and with them they directed fate according to the laws of necessity. As goddesses of birth, who spun the thread of life, and even prophesied the fate of the newly born, Eileithyia was their companion. As goddesses of fate they must necessarily have known the future, which at times they revealed, and were therefore prophetic deities. Their ministers were all the soothsayers and oracles.

As goddesses of death, they appeared together with the Keres and the infernal Erinyes.

The Moirai were described as ugly old women, sometimes lame. They were severe, inflexible and stern. Klotho carries a spindle or a roll (the book of fate), Lakheisis a staff with which she points to the horoscope on a globe, and Atropos a scroll, a wax tablet, a sundial, a pair of scales, or a cutting instrument. At other times the three were shown with staffs or sceptres, the symbols of dominion, and sometimes even with crowns. At the birth of each man they appeared spinning, measuring, and cutting the thread of life.

The Romans called the goddess Parcae and named the three Nona, Decuma and Morta.

KERBEROS (or Cerberus) was the gigantic hound which guarded the gates of Hades. He was posted to prevent ghosts of the dead from leaving the underworld. Kerberos was described as a three-headed dog with a serpent's tail, a mane of snakes, and a lion's claws. Some say he had fifty heads, though this number might have included the heads of his serpentine mane.

Herakles was sent to fetch Kerberos forth from the underworld as one of his twelve labours, a task which he accomplished through the grace of Persephone.

KHARON (or Charon) was the ferryman of the dead, an underworld daimon (spirit) in the service of King Hades. He received the shades of the dead from Hermes, who gathered them from the upper world and guided them to the shores of the Akherousian mere. From there Kharon transported them in his skiff to a final resting place in Hades, the land of the dead, on the other side. The fee for his service was a single obolos coin which was placed in the mouth of a corpse at burial. Those who had not received due

burial and were unable to pay his fee, would be left to wander the earthly side of the Akheron, haunting the upper world as ghosts.

Kharon was portrayed in Greek vase painting as an ugly, bearded man with a crooked nose, wearing a conical hat and tunic. He was shown standing in his skiff holding a pole, about to receive a shade from the psychopompian Hermes.

The Etruscans of central Italy identified him with one of their own underworld daimones who was named Charun after the Greek figure. He was depicted as an even more repulsive creature with blue-grey skin, a tusked mouth, hooked nose and sometimes serpent-draped arms. His attribute was a large, double-headed mallet.

Image right Perseus Project, July 2000 : "Charon, the ferryman, prepares to ferry a soul across the Acheron to Hades. He wears a red tunic (exomis) and conical hat (pilos). In one hand he holds an oar, and with the other he steadies himself on the stern of his boat. On the right is his passenger, a woman wearing a black chiton. Between the two figures are the tall reeds of the river."

KHEIRON (or Chiron) was the eldest and wisest of the Centaurs, a tribe of half-horse men. But unlike the rest of this tribe he was an immortal god, a son of the Titan Kronos and half-brother of Zeus. Kheiron's mother was the nymph Philyra who was coupling with Kronos when his wife suddenly appeared on the scene. To escape notice he transformed himself into a horse, and in this way sired a half-equine son. Some time later when a tribe of Kentauroi (or Centaurs) were spawned on Mount Pelion by the cloud nymph Nephele, Kheiron and his daughters took them into their care and raised them as their own.

The Kentauros was a great teacher who mentored many of the great heroes of myth including Jason, Peleus, Asklepios, Aristaos and Akhilleus. Eventually, however, he passed away from the earth, after accidentally being wounded by Herakles with an arrow coated in Hydra-venom. The wound was incurable, and unbearably painful, so Kheiron voluntarily relinquished his immortality and died. However, instead of being consigned to Hades, he was given a place amongst the stars by Zeus as the constellation Sagittarius or Centaurus.

Kheiron's name was derived from the Greek word for hand (*kheir*), which also meant "skilled with the hands." The name was also closely associated in myth with *kheirourgos* or surgeon. In Athenian vase painting Kheiron was depicted with the full-body of a man, from head to foot, clothed in chiton and boots, with a horse-body attached to the human rump. The image probably reflected his appearance in Greek drama, where costume-limitations reduced his centaurine-form somewhat. By contrast the other Kentauroi, who do not appear in Athenian drama, were depicted unclothed with fully equine forms below the waist.

THE KHIMAIRA (or Chimera) was a monstrous beast which ravaged the countryside of Lykia in Anatolia. It was a composite creature, with the body and maned head of a lion, a goat's head rising from its back, a set of goat-udders, and a serpentine tail.

The hero Bellerophon was commanded to slay it by King Iobates. He rode into battle against the beast on the back of the winged horse Pegasus and, driving a lead-tipped lance down the Khimaira's flaming throat, suffocated it.

The Khimaira may have once been identified with the winter-rising Constellation Capricorn (the serpent-tailed goat). The constellation Pegasus appears to drive her from the heavens in spring.

Late classical writers represent the beast as a metaphor for a Lycian volcano.

## PARENTS

EKHIDNA (or Echidna) was a monstrous she-dragon (drakaina) with the head and breast of a woman. She probably represented or presided over the corruptions of the earth : rot, slime, fetid waters, illness and disease.

She was often equated with Python (the rotting one), a dragon born of the fetid slime left behind by the great Deluge. Others call her the Tartarean lamprey, and assigned her to the dark, swampy pit of Tartaros beneath the earth. Hesiod, makes her a daughter of monstrous sea-gods, and presumably associates her with rotting sea-scum and fetid salt-marshes.

In all cases, she was described as the consort of Typhoeus, a monstrous storm-daemon who challenged Zeus in heaven. Together they spawned a host of terrible monsters to plague the earth.

Other closely related she-dragons included the Argive Ekhidna and Poine, the Tartarean Kampe, and the Phokian Sybaris.

In the image (right), Ekhidna is equated with Python. Apollo seated on the omphalos stone slays her with his arrows : in the motif of healing god (Paian) destroying plague-bringing demon.

## PROCRUSTES

In Greek mythology **Procrustes** (Προκρούστης) or "the stretcher [who hammers out the metal]", also known as **Prokoptas** or **Damastes** (Δαμαστής) "subduer", was a rogue smith and bandit from Attica who physically attacked people, stretching them, or cutting off their legs so as to make them fit an iron bed's size. In general, when something is **Procrustean** different lengths or sizes or properties are fitted to an arbitrary standard.

PAN was the god of shepherds and flocks, of mountain wilds, hunting and rustic music. He wandered the hills and mountains of Arkadia playing his pan-pipes and chasing Nymphs. His unseen presence aroused feelings of panic in men passing through the remote, lonely places of the wilds.

The god was a lover of nymphs, who commonly fled from his advances. Syrinx ran and was transformed into a clump of reeds, out of which the god crafted his famous pan-pipes. Pitys escaped and was turned into a mountain fir, the god's sacred tree. Ekho spurned his advances and fading away left behind only her voice to repeat forever the mountain cries of the god.

Pan was depicted as a man with the horns, legs and tail of a goat, and with thick beard, snub nose and pointed ears. He was often appears in the retinue of Dionysos alongside the other rustic gods. Greeks in the classical age associated his name with the word *pan* meaning "all". However, its true origin lies in an old Arkadian word for rustic.

Pan was frequently identified with other similar rustic gods such as Aristaïos, the shepherd-god of northern Greece, who like Pan was titled both Agreus (the hunter) and Nomios (the shepherd); as well as with the pipe-playing Phrygian satyr Marsyas; and Aigipan, the goat-fish god of the constellation Capricorn. Sometimes Pan was multiplied into a host of Panes, or a triad named Agreus, Nomios, and Phorbas.

In Greco-Roman mythology, **Arachne** (🗣️ /əˈrækni:/) was a great mortal weaver who boasted that her skill was greater than that of Minerva, the Latin parallel of Pallas Athena, goddess of wisdom and crafts. **Arachne** refused to acknowledge that her knowledge came, in part at least, from the goddess. The



offended goddess set a contest between the two weavers. According to Ovid,[1] the goddess was so envious of the magnificent tapestry and the mortal weaver's success, and perhaps offended by the girl's choice of subjects (the loves and transgressions of the gods), that she destroyed the tapestry and loom and slashed the girl's face. "Not even Pallas nor blue-fevered Envy \ Could damn Arachne's work. \ The brown haired goddess Raged at the girl's success, struck through her loom, Tore down the scenes of wayward joys in heaven." [2] Ultimately, the goddess turned Arachne into a spider. Arachne simply means "spider" (ἀράχνη) in Greek.

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**THE MINOTAUROS** (or Minotaur) was a bull-headed monster born to Queen Pasiphae of Krete after she had coupled with a bull.

The creature resided in the twisting maze of the labyrinth, where he was offered a regular sacrifice of youths and maids to satisfy his cannibalistic hunger. He was eventually destroyed by the hero Theseus.

The Minotauros' proper name Asterion, "the starry one," suggests he was associated with the constellation Tauros.

## LOTUS-EATERS

In Greek mythology, the **lotus-eaters** (Greek λωτοφάγοι, *lōtophagoi*), also referred to as the **lotophagi** or **lotophaguses** (singular *lotophagus* /ləˈtɒfəɡəs/) or **lotophages** (singular *lotophage* /ˈlɒtəfeɪdʒ/), were a race of people living on an island near North Africa (possibly Djerba) dominated by lotus plants. The lotus fruits and flowers were the primary food of the island and were narcotic, causing the people to sleep in peaceful apathy.

**THE GORGONES** (or Gorgons) were three powerful, winged daemons named Medousa (Medusa), Sthenno and Euryale. Of the three sisters only Medousa was mortal, and so it was her head which King Polydektes of Seriphos commanded the young hero Perseus to fetch. He accomplished this with the help of the gods who equipped him with a reflective shield, curved sword, winged boots and helm of invisibility. When he fell upon Medousa and decapitated her, two creatures sprang forth from the wound - the winged horse Pegasos and the giant Khrysaor. Perseus fled with the monster's head in a sack, and with her two angry sisters following close upon his heels.

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According to late classical poets, Medousa was once a beautiful maiden who was transformed by Athena into a monster as punishment for lying with Poseidon in her shrine. However, early Greek writers and artists, simply portray her as a monster born of a monstrous family.

The three Gorgones were depicted in ancient Greek vase painting and sculpture as winged women with broad round heads, serpentine locks of hair, large staring eyes, wide mouths, the tusks of swine, lolling tongues, flared nostrils, and sometimes short coarse beards. Medousa was humanised in late classical art with the face of a beautiful woman. In mosaic art her full face was wreathed around with coiling snakes and adorned with a pair of small wings sprouting from the brow.

The poet Hesiod seems to have imagined the Gorgones as reef-creating sea-daemoness, personifications of the deadly submerged reefs which posed such a danger to ancient mariners. As such he names the three petrifiers daughters of dangerous sea-gods. One also bears a distinctly marine name, Euryale, "she of the wide briny sea". Later writers continue this tradition when they speak of reefs being created where Perseus had set the Gorgon's head and where he had turned a sea monster to stone.

In other motifs, the Gorgon Medousa was portrayed as a storm daemon whose visage was set upon the storm-bringing aegis-shield of Athene. The two ideas were probably connected, with sea storms driving

ships to destruction upon the reefs.

Some say there was a but a single goat-like Gorgon, a daughter of the Sun-God, who was slain by Zeus at the start of the Titan-War to form his stormy aegis shield.

In older motifs the Gorgones were probably connected with Demeter Erinys (the Fury) and the three Erinyes. These were the bringers of drought, the withering of crops and the coming of famine. In myth the beheading of Medousa saw the release of two beings - Pegasos (of the springs) and Khrysaor (golden blade). This story might have represented the ending of drought with the release of the waters of springs (pegai) and the growth of golden (khryse) blades of grain. Demeter herself was titled Khrysaoros in Homeric poetry, further suggesting a close link between the name and blades of corn.

PERSEUS was one of the most celebrated of the Greek heroes. His story was as follows:--Perseus' mother Danae was locked in a bronze chamber by her father Akrisios, where she was impregnated by Zeus in the form of a golden shower. Akrisios put both mother and child in a chest and set them adrift in the sea, but they washed safely ashore on the island of Seriphos. Later when Perseus was grown, King Polydektes, command he bring back the head of Medousa. With the help of the gods, Perseus first obtained an invisible helm, magical sword, and winged sandals. He then stole the single eye of the Graiai, three ancient hags, who told him where to find the Gorgones. The hero approached the sleeping Medousa, and beheaded her with eyes turned away, to avoid her petrifying visage. On his way back to Greece, he spied the princess Andromeda chained to the rocks as a sacrifice to a sea-monster. Perseus slew the monster, and rescued the girl, bringing her back to Greece as his bride. On Seriphos, he turned King Polydektes to stone, then travelled to his grandfather's kingdom to claim the throne. The old man fled, and was later accidentally killed by Perseus at some Games with an awry discus throw.

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Perseus was the ancestor through his sons and daughter of the royal houses of Mykenai, Elis, Sparta, Messenia, and distant Persia. His most famous descendant of all was Herakles

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